



News From

Maggie Brooks

Monroe County Executive

For Immediate Release

2006 State of the County Address **Monroe County Executive Maggie Brooks** **Wednesday, January 18, 2006 -- 7:00 P.M.**

Good evening. Before I begin my remarks, I ask that you join me in observing a moment of silence in honor of the men and women of Monroe County who defend our freedom in the United States military, and for those we have lost, including most recently, Private First Class Jason Hasenauer of Parma.

Thank you.

I would also like to pay tribute to the 24 Monroe County Employees who have taken military leave during the years following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Some of them are presently on active duty in Iraq and Afghanistan, some of them are back home and back to work at their jobs, and two of them are with us tonight. Please join me in welcoming Sylvester Thomas and Hector Alvarado. Thank you both for your service and sacrifice. You make all of us very proud.

Mr. President, Majority Leader Smith, Minority Leader Palumbo, Sheriff O'Flynn, County Clerk Dinolfo, District Attorney Green, Senator Robach, Assemblyman Reilich, Mayor Duffy, Chairman Minarik, Chairman Cook, distinguished guests, friends and fellow taxpayers...

There is a saying, *"In order to know where you're going, it's important to know where you've been."*

Tonight, we look back upon our accomplishments from 2005, but more important, we look ahead to 2006 and beyond.

Over the last two years, we have seen what can be accomplished when we work together as a community. Through our words - and even more so, through our actions - we have made a powerful statement: Governing is a team sport; collaboration works!

I want to thank Mayor Bob Duffy for being here tonight. I have enjoyed working with you and your new administration at City Hall over the past 18 days, and I look forward to the many promising opportunities to work together that lie ahead of us. Let the Brooks-Duffy era pick-up where Mayor Johnson and I left off. Let us pledge to be at one another's side. Let us join in partnership when we have the opportunities to do so. Let us support each other as we work to achieve our goals. And, let us come together to build a stronger community, without letting boundaries get in the way.

My friends, our community faces many challenges, but as I like to say, with every challenge comes opportunity. So long as we recognize those opportunities, the State of our County will continue to improve, and our community will grow stronger and better, each and every day.

A Strong Community focuses its attention on job creation by nurturing innovation and supporting business development. In doing so, we continue to keep faith with local taxpayers.

Throughout our community's history, our economy has been driven by entrepreneurship, innovation and technology. Our community has prospered because of the creativity and initiative of entrepreneurs like George Eastman, John Jacob Bausch and Chester Carlson, who took their ideas and turned them into multi-billion dollar companies.

We have many entrepreneurs in our community today who have achieved impressive success. Others, who are leading emerging-growth companies, have the same potential for greatness. However, we are no longer living and working in a local economy, but a global economy, where competition is fierce and the path to success is much more challenging. Access to resources, expertise and the necessary strategic alliances are not always readily available in our community.

We have world-class universities and a number of technology-based corporations producing a large number of patent filings each year. In fact, Rochester is one of the most inventive metropolitan areas in America, with patents per worker well above the national average. Our community must foster a dynamic entrepreneurial environment that provides the training and mentoring that entrepreneurs need to successfully bring their ideas to the marketplace, and in doing so, grow the job-base of our future.

That is why I am announcing tonight, a new initiative for promising high-tech entrepreneurs. Monroe County is developing a new organization, The Enterprise Institute, which will offer a practical, business-oriented, and hands-on educational program in which entrepreneurs will be exposed to world-renowned speakers with expertise in start-up companies. These experts will share information, including how to secure venture capital, form strategic alliances, identify market strategies and other practical information necessary to compete in today's competitive business environment.

Unlike current training programs that are offered on an ad-hoc basis, or once a year, the Enterprise Institute will provide a structured, ongoing program. What makes this new initiative even more important is that it will be a regional initiative. The program will serve a regional audience spanning Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse and Ithaca, capturing the best and brightest minds in Upstate New York - and it will be located here in Monroe County.

What is our goal? Our goal is jobs. We want to keep entrepreneurs here in our community, and attract the expertise and capital they need to start their businesses, so they will create the next generation of high-tech companies that will provide jobs and investment in Monroe County.

The Enterprise Institute will be modeled after existing national programs and will be guided by a group of national advisors. The advisors will be members of entrepreneurial institutes and experienced venture capital funds in the Northeast.

The County of Monroe Industrial Development Agency (COMIDA) will provide the seed funds for the first three years of the Enterprise Institute. Monroe County is committed to bringing the resources necessary to continue our community's role as an economic engine for our region and Western New York.

Our colleges and universities are engines that drive start-up ventures and job creation in our area. Monroe County considers each of our colleges and universities to be our partners in job creation and economic growth.

This year, Monroe County has welcomed four new college presidents, and the potential for this new leadership team is encouraging. University of Rochester President Joel Seligman, Nazareth College President Daan Braveman, SUNY Brockport President John Halstead and St. John Fisher College President Donald Bain...I look forward to working with them, along with RIT President Al Simone, Roberts Wesleyan College President John Martin and MCC President Tom Flynn, to advance the economic momentum underway in our community.

President Braveman and President Halstead, thank you both for joining us this evening.

This year, I will launch an "Annual Leaders Summit" with our College Presidents, and our first order of business will be job creation. The Leaders Summit will be a collaborative effort that will seek to more actively engage the university community in business development opportunities throughout Monroe County.

When it comes to job creation, we have some impressive numbers that we can point to. In 2005, Monroe County assisted 138 local economic development projects. These projects will create over 4,000 new jobs, retain over 13,600 jobs and invest over \$515 million in Monroe County.

The 138 projects approved in 2005 represent a 20% increase over 2004. Additionally, projected job creation is up 319%, job retention is up 181% and investment is up 173%. These significant increases can be attributed to major projects approved in 2005, including expansions at Bausch & Lomb, CooperVision, Xerox, Unisys, Paychex, Alleson Athletic, and MWI.

According to the most recent statistics from the U.S. Department of Labor, Monroe County leads our two largest neighbors, Onondaga County and Erie County, in employment growth. Clearly, our diverse economy helped put us in this position.

Our community's highly skilled workforce, exceptional quality of life, and top ranked colleges and universities give Monroe County a competitive edge over other communities across the state and nation, and the incentive programs that Monroe County is able to offer are important tools in our job retention and creation efforts.

Each month, as part of our Executive Outreach program, I visit local companies that have capitalized on the economic incentives we offer to grow their businesses. These visits give me the opportunity to see firsthand the diverse businesses we have here. The products being

developed and made in Monroe County never cease to impress me, and when I tell others about them, I always get the same response, “I didn’t know that was done here!”

Well, did you know, a Rochester-based company invented and produced the touch screens and screenwriters used by football commentators, to do the play-by-play on NFL broadcasts. Hammer Packaging makes the labels you find on products like Snapple, Poland Spring and Tostitos? ITT is working on the new James Webb Space Telescope, the successor to the Hubble Telescope. Alleson Athletic designs and manufactures the sporting apparel and uniforms you find in sporting goods stores across the country.

Sentry Safe, which recently moved an entire production line from China and located it here in Monroe County, makes fire-resistant safes found in households all across America.

Diamond Packaging makes packaging for well-known consumer products like Gillette razors, Godiva Chocolates and the new Shania by Stetson perfume, featured on an episode of last season’s “The Apprentice.” Harris RF Communications manufactures the military radios used by our troops in Iraq and around the globe.

Tonight, I’d like to recognize three additional companies that are putting our community on the map.

In October 2005, we announced that a newly formed high-tech company, Rochester Precision Optics, would locate its business in Monroe County.

The company purchased the assets of Kodak’s precision glass manufacturing operation and will manufacture lenses, largely for the commercial imaging, defense and medical industries. Rochester Precision Optics will create 75 new jobs and invest nearly \$10 million in our community. Rochester Precision Optics could have located this company in New Hampshire, but they chose Monroe County.

The incentives Monroe County and New York State were able to offer, coupled with our community’s leadership in optics and innovation, enabled us to compete and ultimately succeed in bringing this new business here. Rochester Precision Optics will officially open their doors in Henrietta next month.

Calvary Automation Systems was founded in 1994. Calvary Automation is recognized as a leading manufacturer of special machines, turnkey automated systems, and specialized fixturing. Many of Calvary Automation’s customers are in the electronics, consumer products, automotive and medical device industries.

In 2003, Calvary expanded their operations in Monroe County for the third time in their brief history, purchasing a 70,000 square foot facility at Henrietta’s Erie Station Industrial Park. Monroe County assisted in the project by providing a tax-exempt bond through COMIDA. Recently, Calvary was able to purchase \$200,000 worth of equipment to support their growth, by using the County’s GreatRebate program. Calvary Automation currently employs over 65 people

in Monroe County. Calvary Automation is Monroe County's Business of the Month for January, and is featured on the County website.

You may recognize the name of the next company, Nalge Nunc International, and you more than likely own, or have used, one of their many products.

Nalge Nunc designs, develops and manufactures a broad range of plastic products for lab use, including beakers, test tube racks, and dispensers. Nalge manufactures 4,700 different items and sells to 74,000 labs throughout the world. Nalge Nunc also makes high-end products for outdoor and camping use through their popular Nalgene Outdoor brand. Chances are, you or someone you know owns at least one of their water bottles - my daughters own several.

Nalge Nunc maintains their U.S. operations entirely within Monroe County in facilities in Penfield, Fairport and the City of Rochester. In 2004, Nalge's parent company closed a Chicago plant and moved those jobs and operations to Monroe County.

Nalge Nunc employs over 1,000 people in Monroe County, and in the last few years Nalge has invested over \$12 million in its plant and equipment.

Please join me in recognizing the individuals behind these successful local companies: Bill Hurley, President of Rochester Precision Optics and his Director of Precision Glass Molding, Brian Bundschuh; Tom Passero, Vice President of Calvary Automation Systems; and Martin Wheeler, Vice President, Human Resources and David Eddy, Director of Manufacturing, with Nalge Nunc International. Thank you all for joining us this evening. Thank you for your continued investment in our community, and thank you for creating jobs in Monroe County.

Believe it or not, there are literally hundreds of jobs in our community which are currently going unfilled. These are quality jobs and they pay great wages; they are high-tech manufacturing jobs. Monroe County government has been working in partnership with Monroe Community College and local businesses to identify and train a new generation of workers to fill these positions.

Last year, through a partnership with RochesterWorks!, New York Wired for Education, local school districts and area businesses, we launched "Digital Afternoons," an innovative job-readiness program that trains high school students in technology and business skills, and provides them with internships at participating Rochester-area companies.

Our pilot program was a great success, with 20 students completing the curriculum. Employer satisfaction was outstanding. Several businesses hired the youth after the program ended because they were so impressed with the individual student and their skills.

This year, we are expanding the Digital Afternoons program, and I want to thank Senator Jim Alesi and Senator Joe Robach for their support of this initiative.

This program is a win-win. It not only gives our youth a positive and productive way to spend their summers, it also helps them gain valuable workplace experience that will help them

compete for jobs. And it also helps us retain young people in our community and support local businesses, which are key to Monroe County's future economic vitality.

A Strong Community fosters job creation and keeps faith with local tax payers by thinking big and acting boldly to revitalize its identity.

Our plans for Renaissance Square continue to move forward. We have secured close to \$160 million in public funds for the project, thanks to the support of Governor Pataki and our state and federal delegations. Our United States Senators, Chuck Schumer and Hillary Clinton, worked hard in 2005, both individually and collectively, to ensure that the federal dollars we sought were delivered for Renaissance Square.

Our Design Architect for the project, internationally renowned architect, Moshe Safdie, has been working closely with the members of our local Design Team. Last September, Moshe and the Design Team unveiled preliminary designs for the project, which reflected much of the feedback and suggestions shared with us by community groups and interested citizens, including locating the transit center at street level, rather than underground. Hundreds of people have participated in the four public workshops we've held to date, and hundreds more have provided their input through the Renaissance Square website.

To continue to engage the community in this project, we also created five community advisory panels. Three of the panels are focused on each project component – the transit center, MCC campus and performing arts center. We also have a Community Leaders Panel and an Accessibility Panel.

Renaissance Square will be a first-class center for transportation, education and entertainment. It will create over 1,200 construction jobs and will help to re-create our Center City, sparking additional investment in the downtown area. A vibrant and attractive Center City is not only important to the City of Rochester, but to the economic interests of our entire community.

The preliminary design phase is scheduled for completion this spring. The overall design phase should be complete by fall 2007, with construction taking place soon thereafter.

I want to thank our Renaissance Square Project Partners: Mayor Duffy; MCC President Tom Flynn; RGRTA CEO Mark Aesch; and, Arts and Cultural Council President and CEO Sarah Lentini. This project would not be possible without their enthusiastic support and involvement.

Our success as a community in obtaining federal funds for local projects does not end with Renaissance Square.

Our congressional representatives have also secured over \$20 million for County road projects, which reduces the need to borrow and spend local taxpayer dollars for these improvements.

I want to publicly thank Congressman Tom Reynolds, Congresswoman Louise Slaughter, Congressman Jim Walsh and Congressman Randy Kuhl for securing such an impressive amount of federal funding and bringing it home to Monroe County!

A Strong Community does everything in its power to remain a safe community. Jobs and residents flee from those communities that fail to provide this most basic responsibility of local government, and the taxpayers who are left behind, end up paying the price.

Here in Monroe County, we are indeed fortunate to be recognized nationally as a leader in public safety and emergency preparedness, and we've worked hard to achieve this recognition.

I am proud that by working in collaboration with Sheriff Patrick O'Flynn and in partnership with our entire public safety community, Monroe County is moving forward to significantly enhance its law enforcement communications system.

This improved system will enable our first-responders to better communicate and work together more effectively, making this a safer community for us all. This marks the most significant investment in law enforcement communications in over twenty years, and that's an accomplishment we can all be proud of.

Violent crime remains a persistent problem in some areas of our community, especially certain neighborhoods of the City of Rochester. The age of those perpetrating these crimes, as well as their victims, is becoming younger and younger each year.

Monroe County continues to employ bold and innovative strategies designed to reduce youth violence in our community with a focus on employing evidence based, cost effective strategies. To that end, Monroe County is partnering with Cayuga Home for Children to provide Multi Systemic Therapy, or MST, for troubled youth and their families.

MST is an intensive treatment model that is focused on family and community. Services are delivered in the home, school and neighborhood settings, because in order to help troubled youth, we must strengthen the support systems that surround them. Research has demonstrated that MST improves family and peer relations and results in fewer arrests and other associated behavioral problems.

In addition, Monroe County has partnered with the New York State Office of Children and Family Services to establish the Monroe County Juvenile Justice Initiative. The Juvenile Justice Initiative is a demonstration project designed to reduce the high rate of recidivism among youth offenders.

To launch this project, we successfully advocated for a fundamental shift in state policy. Rather than transferring our youth outside the County for residential placement, youth are now being transferred from the Children's Center located in the City of Rochester, to Industry, a state-run facility in Rush.

Thanks to the support of Congressman Tom Reynolds, who secured federal funding, youth in our Children's Center and at Industry now receive coordinated educational programs, vocational training and other services during their treatment and after their release.

This innovative program has been endorsed by the academic community, law enforcement, crime victims, judges, and juvenile justice professionals and has proven to be an effective model for helping troubled youth redirect their lives. Later this week, State officials will come to Monroe County to recognize our Juvenile Justice Initiative as an example for other communities to emulate.

A Strong Community enhances its quality of life by investing in family-friendly attractions, for residents and visitors alike. Local businesses promote these attractions in their job recruitment and job retention efforts. Every worker who wants to keep their family in our community and every new worker who locates here makes Monroe County that much stronger. At the end of the day, our local taxpayers are the true beneficiaries.

One of our community's premiere family attractions, Monroe County's Seneca Park Zoo, is expecting big things, and in particular, one VERY big thing. Genny C, our African elephant and first-time mother, is expecting a baby, which is expected to arrive between February 9 and March 15 of this year. As the anticipated birth of Genny C's baby draws closer, the enthusiasm and excitement is building. Genny C has been doing well, and we continue to be cautiously optimistic that she will have a safe and successful birth.

Last year, we launched the Bucks for the Baby campaign to give the community an opportunity to be a part of this historic moment for Monroe County and the Seneca Park Zoo. Thanks to the generous support of the community, Bucks for the Baby has raised close to \$40,000 to date.

Gabe and Jean Dalmath are the Co-chairs of the Bucks for the Baby Campaign. Gabe and Jean, thank you for your support of our community's Zoo.

Genny C's pregnancy was the catalyst for us to come together and develop a plan to build a new, more spacious exhibit for our elephants. We did this by reaching out to all sides and agreeing on a plan, together.

The Elephant Exhibit is scheduled to open this spring.

Tonight, I am pleased to share an exciting expansion of our vision for the new Elephant Exhibit that has been developed by the Seneca Park Zoo Society's Board of Trustees. Because our expanded Elephant herd will be a major destination for visitors, the Zoo Society has developed exciting exhibit enhancements, centered around the Elephants, that create a greater African experience. Plans include permanent lion and baboon exhibits and a visitor center.

The Seneca Park Zoo Society will soon launch an ambitious Capital Campaign to raise the necessary funds for this project. The cost of the project is estimated to be \$6 million, which the Zoo Society will raise in its entirety from private donors, foundations and grants from other levels of government. We look forward to continuing our successful partnership with the Zoo Society, to enhance the number one family attraction in Monroe County.

A Strong Community that wants to continue its successful job creation efforts and keep faith with local taxpayers must recognize its budgetary challenges and face them, head-on.

At a local cost of nearly \$162 million, Medicaid remains the single largest expense for County taxpayers.

The reform measures enacted in Albany last year replaced annual double-digit cost increases and uncertainty with a cost structure that we can plan around and accurately budget for.

So have we declared victory on Medicaid and moved on to the next challenge?

No, we have not.

As long as there are potential savings to achieve, we will remain at the forefront of this issue.

I am honored to serve on the Federal Medicaid Commission, which was created last year. As the only public official from a local government named to this national panel, I am able to offer a unique perspective to the commission's deliberations. In fact, I've become known on the Commission as "the voice of the local taxpayer."

And speaking of local taxpayers, here in Monroe County we continue to advance savings initiatives of our own. Last June, we launched an effort to educate our medical community about the cost effectiveness of prescribing generic drugs for their patients covered by Medicaid. This home-grown initiative has saved over \$2 million to date, with local a share of over \$500,000 in savings.

Another innovative program that we believe has significant potential to impact our budget is our partnership with IBM, in an initiative called "Verify New York." Working with IBM, we will look to identify and eliminate instances of fraud and abuse in the Medicaid system in Monroe County, especially among providers. What's our goal? To ensure that our taxpayer dollars are truly helping the needy, not benefiting the greedy!

Our local efforts to achieve savings and efficiencies in Monroe County's Medicaid program will be greatly enhanced this year by the work of our new "Medicaid Czar," Bill Carpenter.

Whenever we talk about fiscal challenges faced by Monroe County, we are inevitably presented with the question, "What are you going to do about Monroe Community Hospital?"

Questions about the financial viability of Monroe Community Hospital began well before I became County Executive, and they persist today.

In 1994, a study of Monroe Community Hospital's operations was performed by Ernst and Young. In 1996, KPMG Peat Marwick studied the facility, again. And, in 2004, my own Budget Advisory Team suggested that we seriously consider the outsourcing of management and staffing of the hospital, as well as the outright sale of the hospital to a private management company.

Let's face it, one thing that Monroe Community Hospital will never be is a profit center for County Government.

So let me tell you what Monroe Community Hospital is. Monroe Community Hospital is a 566 bed residential health care facility that provides quality long-term care to individuals with complex and chronic health conditions. Monroe Community Hospital is a HOME to residents who span multiple generations, from infants as young as eight weeks to adults more than one-hundred years old.

Monroe Community Hospital is an important community asset. And, Monroe Community Hospital is owned, managed and operated by Monroe County.

I believe the time has come to end the debate over the future of Monroe Community Hospital. Ongoing uncertainty has caused undue stress for residents and their families and constant concern over job security for our hard-working health care professionals and hospital staff.

I will create and appoint a permanent Financial Review Board for Monroe Community Hospital that will recommend cost-savings and operational efficiencies on an on-going basis. I envision the board working with management, staff and our service providers toward a common goal of fiscally sustainable operation of the hospital. The membership of the Financial Review Board will, of course, include individuals with backgrounds in business management and health care, but it will be broad enough in scope to encompass all perspectives, including those of residents and their families. I will also invite County Legislators, from both the Majority and the Minority, to participate on this board.

I am confident that our management team, hospital staff and the new Financial Review Board will effectively improve operations and control costs, so that Monroe County's continued support of Monroe Community Hospital remains an affordable option for taxpayers. Therefore, I can make the following pledge: As long as I serve as your County Executive, Monroe Community Hospital will not be closed, sold or privatized. It will continue to be a County owned, managed and operated facility - end of discussion, end of debate.

The overriding challenge of 2006 is, of course, Monroe County's long-term financial condition. That should be no surprise to anyone in this room or anyone in our community. I have been completely straightforward from the day I took office in talking about the ongoing fiscal challenges that County government faces.

For the last two years, through a combination of budgetary discipline, innovative thinking, cost savings and one-time measures, we have been able to keep Monroe County deficit-free.

The 2006 County Budget, which was adopted by the County Legislature with a bi-partisan super-majority, will do so, as well.

I'm proud of these efforts. I'm proud of the fresh approach we have taken over the last two years -- a new financial team, the day-to-day assistance of each County Employee, the ongoing partnership of community agencies, the bi-partisan support of the County Legislature, and the

continued thumbs-up I receive, wherever I go, from the citizens of our community. I am most proud that we have been able to deliver balanced budgets that are free of deficits while keeping the County property tax rate FLAT. On January 1, 2004, the day I took the oath of office as County Executive, the property tax rate was \$9.10, and that's where it stands today.

So if we've been successfully avoiding deficits and our 2006 Budget is balanced, what's the cause for concern? Well, to put it as simply as I can, it's 2007, 2008 and beyond.

If we do nothing, if our mandated expenses continue to increase at about the same level as they have in recent years, we will be facing a combined budget gap for 2007 and 2008 of about \$102 million. Again, this is not "breaking news." I presented you with this forecast back in October.

It's up to us, all of us, to address this financial challenge this year, before a crisis is imminently upon us and while we still have the fiscal breathing room to do so.

Some of the cost savings and efficiencies that we have implemented over the last two years provide us with a significant head start.

- We can applaud our Monroe County workforce for contributing to the bulk of our savings. This diverse group of men and women are dedicated public employees who touch our lives and make our community a great place to live each and every day. From protecting our families, to maintaining our parks, to fixing our roads, to safeguarding our environment, to caring for the least fortunate and most vulnerable among us -- they do all that, and so much more. They understand, better than anyone else, that the challenges our County faces are real, and they have stepped-up to the plate:
 - The wages for most County employees were frozen for 2004 and 2005, which resulted in a taxpayer savings of \$18 million;
 - We renegotiated our employee health insurance contracts with our provider, and by moving to an experience-rated product we maintained quality health care coverage for County workers while saving taxpayers \$12 million per year, and that's not a one time savings, it's a savings that recurs each year going forward.
 - By individually scrutinizing each vacancy that occurs, to determine if it needs to be filled immediately, or at all, we have reduced the number of both full-time and part-time County employees since I took office;
 - And, through honest but tough negotiations, we have new contracts in place with a majority of our employee unions that contain reasonable wage increments averaging less than 2% per year, which is considerably less than the average for public employees in New York State, which ranges from 3% to 4.36%.
- Consolidation of operations within County Departments is saving taxpayers \$1 million per year;

- And, the in-sourcing of Foster Care Services resulted in taxpayer savings of \$1.2 million in 2005 and \$1.6 million in 2006.

While these savings are significant, we must continue to do more.

There's one area of County government that deserves our attention and scrutiny more than any other. Mandated social service spending on welfare programs and high caseloads at the Department of Human Services are responsible for a significant portion of our deficit projections.

But if County governments are mandated to spend tax dollars on welfare programs, aren't we just wasting our time by analyzing this spending?

Not by a long shot.

Yes, County governments are mandated by New York State to pay for welfare programs, but it's up to us, at the County level, to ensure that those who apply for these programs and those who are enrolled are eligible for their benefits.

I believe that Monroe County can do a much better job of administering our welfare programs, from screening applicants to managing our caseload.

Why do I believe this? Because Onondaga County, whose County Seat is the City of Syracuse, is doing a much better job than we are, and they're doing it now.

Let's look at the two welfare programs that most significantly impact mandated spending: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and Safety Net. These are programs intended to assist families and individuals during times of economic transition.

The percentage of Monroe County's population receiving Temporary Assistance benefits is nearly 42% higher than in Onondaga County.

The percentage of Monroe County's population receiving Safety Net benefits is over 110% higher than in Onondaga County.

The difference is staggering!

Is this because there are that many more people in need, here in Monroe County? Actually, it's not. The rate of poverty in each of our counties is very similar. According to the latest statistics provided by the State of New York, the Child Poverty Rate is 20.7% in Monroe County and 19.6% in Onondaga County. But when you look at the percentage of each county's population enrolled in welfare programs, that's where the similarities end.

Clearly, Onondaga County's successful efforts are key to reducing our welfare expenditures and reducing our County taxpayer subsidy of these programs.

Therefore, I will instruct the Monroe County Department of Human Services to fully benchmark our administration of mandated welfare programs to the Onondaga County model. Doing so will ultimately result in an annual savings of \$16 million for Monroe County taxpayers, and I will set the goal of fully achieving these savings by 2009.

Monroe County's families don't have the luxury of spending beyond their means. Neither should Monroe County's government.

This strategy does not translate to casting aside our most needy residents or declaring a "War against the Poor." It's about carefully screening applicants to ensure that only those who qualify for welfare programs are enrolled in the first place. It's about working more aggressively to move individuals and families from our welfare rolls into meaningful jobs. It's about helping the less fortunate members of our society rebuild their lives and achieve the dignity found only in a steady paycheck.

Radical change of this nature will require a culture shift at the Department of Human Services. We must reform our approach to social service delivery in Monroe County, from the mindset of our social workers, to the cooperation of our community and agency partners, to the attitude of our clients. This change will not be easy, but we cannot afford the consequences of inaction.

These savings are important first steps toward eliminating the budget deficits we have projected beyond 2006, but as significant as they are they will not bring us to long-term fiscal stability.

That will take further financial discipline, additional reform and having the community will to end the imbalance between revenues and expenses.

In the coming months, we must work together on a solution that will spare our community the devastation that Erie County recently brought upon itself.

The Erie County reality is loss of jobs, closed parks, fewer police on the streets, decreased services, a severely impacted quality of life and turning over management of County finances to a State control board.

Leadership often requires having to make tough choices.

No amount of political pride or partisan pressure will force me to send our community into turmoil or crisis. That is my commitment to you.

I will propose a strategy to fix our long-term financial challenges, and because the stakes are so high I will present my plan within the next 90 days.

A Strong Community is represented by dedicated public servants...

This year, we welcome 10 new representatives to the County Legislature. This is the first time we've had a transition of this magnitude in County government.

We may have lost some institutional knowledge, but I think we will find that we have gained new insights, new perspectives and new ideas.

Please join me in recognizing each of our 10 new Legislators: Dick Yolevich, Steve Tucciarello, Ray DiRaddo, Ciaran Hanna, Carrie Andrews, Glen Gamble, Paul Haney, Harry Bronson, Willie Lightfoot, and Travis Heider.

The County Legislature has always been, and continues to be, an important partner in County government.

As we begin a new year together, let us remember that the highest public office, is that of private citizen. We must never lose sight that we serve the people of this community. We are their representatives, and they entrust us to make the best decisions for this place we all call home.

I thank each of you for your public service to the citizens of Monroe County, and I look forward to working with all of you.

Challenges... and opportunities.

Clearly, we have come a long way over the last two years and, as I have outlined for you this evening, we still have a way to go.

Are the challenges we face insurmountable? Of course not.

We will continue to move our community forward by working together and seizing upon the opportunities before us.

What's ultimately at stake is the future of our community.

As a Strong Community we recognize that our future will be most promising if we continue to focus our efforts on jobs, helping to keep the jobs we have and offering incentives for the creation of new jobs, and more jobs, in our community.

As a Strong Community we recognize that the quality of life we build today will impact the future of our community for years to come.

As a Strong Community we put our taxpayers first - and without them, our community has no future. Cost savings, budget efficiencies and long-term fiscal stability - each have but one goal: Providing relief to taxpayers who are overburdened, in the first place.

Am I optimistic about the future of our community? You bet I am!

The future is ours to determine. Let's get to work, now -- today -- and ensure a brighter tomorrow!

###